

M. H. Houston

How was Jesus Baptized?

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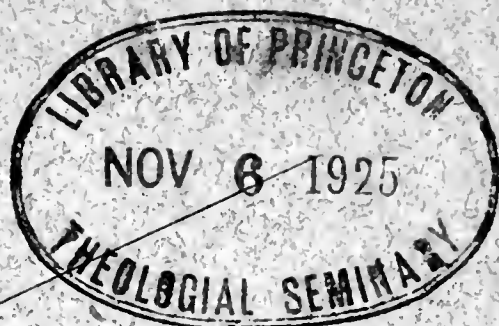


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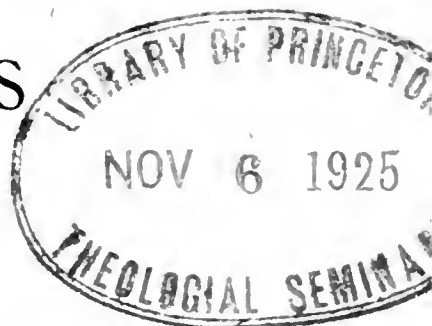


HOW WAS
JESUS BAPTIZED?

BY

Rev. M. H. HOUSTON.

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REV. M. W. HOUSTON.

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HOW WAS

JESUS BAPTIZED?

WAS it by immersion or by sprinkling?

Suppose the question were raised, How was Mr. Arthur Smith baptized in Humility Church, New York, in the year 1870? Suppose it were shown that the form of worship of Humility Church directed that the pastor should always baptize by sprinkling. Suppose it were proved that for a hundred years the pastors of Humility Church had administered baptism by sprinkling, and in no other way. Then when the question was raised, How was Mr. Arthur Smith baptized in Humility Church? the inference would be irresistible. He must have

been baptized by sprinkling. Every one acquainted with the church would say so at once. If any man said otherwise, he would be bound to furnish the clearest and most direct evidence for so remarkable an assertion.

MODE OF BAPTISM FIXED.

Now, not for a hundred years only, but for fifteen hundred years before Jesus was baptized, baptism had been administered in the nation to which He belonged. It was a religious rite universally known and practised among the Jews. All biblical scholars admit this. Every writer on this subject, Pædobaptist or anti-Pædobaptist, has declared it. Paul shows us (Heb. ix. 10,) that, from the time of Moses down to his own time, there had been “divers baptisms.”* Every allusion to baptism in the gospels implies that it was a rite with which all Jews were familiar. If we ascertain, then, how baptism had been administered among the Jews during the fifteen hundred years before

* English version, “divers washings.”

Christ, we will know beyond doubt how the meek and lowly Jew, the blessed Jesus, was baptized.

Our brethren who favor immersion all hold that for God's people there is only one Scriptural mode of baptism with water. We fully assent to this. We say, too, that there is only one Scriptural mode of baptism with water. If, then, we fix the Scriptural mode of baptism before Christ, the mode—the one only mode—is fixed for all time to come. Let us proceed to do this.

FACTS ADMITTED BY ALL.

In the baptism of Jesus by John there are some facts which stand out clear and undisputed—

1. There was a divinely-appointed administrator of the rite—John. He was of the same tribe with Moses and Aaron—the tribe of Levi.

2. The divinely-appointed administrator used water.

3. It was running water.

We have now a basis of facts admitted by all sides. Only one mode of baptism with water for God's people; that mode practised through fifteen centuries before Christ; that mode followed by John; the divinely-appointed administrator using water; the water used being running, or as the Jews expressed it, living water. The question, then, is, How did the divinely-appointed administrators of the religious rite from Moses to Christ use water? As they administered the rite, so John administered it. Was it by immersion, or was it by sprinkling?

ALWAYS BY SPRINKLING; NEVER BY IMMERSION.

The Scriptures give an answer to this question so clear, so broad, so emphatic, that it has never been challenged. In every case, from Moses downward, where a divinely-appointed administrator used water upon any one, he always sprinkled the water on the person; he

never immersed. And in every case where a divinely-appointed administrator used water, it was always running water, and no other kind of water was allowed. These things are susceptible of an easy proof; if proved, they must settle the question.

WATER SPRINKLED ON ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

The first instance recorded in the Bible where a divinely-appointed administrator used water upon any one, is that of Moses consecrating to God at Sinai the many thousands of Israel. (Compare Ex. chap. xxiv. and Heb. ix. 19–21.) The only water at Mount Sinai was the brook, (Ex. xvii. 6, and Dent. ix. 21,) which, springing from the smitten rock, came leaping and flashing down the mountain side. It was this running water which Moses used. And how did he use it? He sprinkled it upon the vast multitudes of his people. When Paul, in the ninth chapter of Hebrews, speaks of the “baptisms” of the Old Testament, he proceeds at once to tell us of two cases in which water was

sprinkled upon the people of God. Moses sprinkling the people is one of these cases.

A beautiful analogy may be traced here between the first recorded baptism of the Old Testament, and the first recorded baptism of the New. Moses baptized in the wilderness of Sinai. John baptized in the wilderness of Judea. Moses baptized hundreds of thousands of the people of Israel. John baptized the multitudes that are described as "Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." Moses used the running water of the brook. John used the running water of the Jordan. It would have been a physical impossibility for Moses to immerse the thronging crowds about him. It would have been equally an impossibility for John to immerse the multitudes that came out to him. Moses sprinkled the water of the brook on all the people. As there is only one mode of baptism, John must have sprinkled the water of the Jordan on all the multitudes. And as John baptized the multitudes, so, no one will dis-

pute, he baptized Jesus. If the multitudes were baptized by sprinkling, Jesus was baptized by sprinkling too.

WATER SPRINKLED ON CLEANSED LEPERS.

The second case in the Old Testament in which a divinely-appointed administrator used water upon any one is described in the fourteenth chapter of Leviticus. In every generation "many lepers were in Israel," and leprosy was the hideous type of sin as a disease. As in every generation under the gospel some sinners are cleansed, so in every generation under the law some lepers, no doubt, were healed. As a minister of God is appointed under the gospel to baptize with water the cleansed sinner, so a minister of God was appointed under the law to baptize with water the healed leper. The minister under the law was the priest. It was particularly enjoined on him that he should use running water; and this running water he must sprinkle on the healed leper. It is plain, then, that John the Baptist's father, his grand-

father, and all his priestly ancestry, had again and again used water in this way. They went to the river Jordan, or to the springs of *Ænon*,* or to some other flowing stream; they took the running water and sprinkled it upon the man now typically cleansed from sin.

WATER SPRINKLED ON MEN SET APART FOR
GOD'S SERVICE.

The third case to which we turn is the consecration of the Levites to God. (Num. viii. 5.) As the minister of God now solemnly consecrates believers in baptism, so Moses consecrated the Levites. The water he used was the water of purifying. The water of purifying, we are told in Numbers xix. 9, 17, was running water; and God said to Moses, "Take

* *Ænon* means "springs." Our English version is wrong in saying "there was much water there." The words translated "much water," occur in Rev. i. 15; xiv. 2; xix. 6, where attention is called to the rushing, murmuring, musical sound of water in motion. They indicate water running in a number of streams, either great or small, and in Revelation are rightly translated "many waters."

the Levites, * * * and thus shalt thou do unto them to cleanse them: sprinkle water of purifying upon them.”

**WATER SPRINKLED ON MEN TO CLEANSE FROM
TYPICAL SIN.**

Next to leprosy, and ranking above it as an awful type of sin, was death. The natural state of all men in the world is “dead in trespasses and sins.” In Israel, every man who came in contact with death was defiled. Whether he touched a corpse, or a grave, or the bone of a man, or whether he was only in the room where a dead man lay, he was polluted as by sin, and must be cleansed with water. (Num. xix.) For this cleansing there was a divinely-appointed administrator. It was any undefiled person. The undefiled man was to take water. God again said that it must be running water, and this running water the undefiled man must sprinkle on the defiled. If the water was not sprinkled upon him he was not recognized as one of God’s people. He was “cut off from among the congregation,

because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord; the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean."

WATER SPRINKLED IN MILLIONS OF CASES.

In every generation of Israel, taken on an average, there were at least three million deaths. For each death there were at least seven persons who came into the presence of the corpse, or who touched the grave. In every generation, therefore, there were at least twenty-one million cases in which one Jew sprinkled water on another. When we count all the generations from Moses to Christ, the millions swell to a number that no man can conceive. And in all these millions upon millions of cases, persons went to the river Jordan, or the brook Kishon, or the springs of Ænon, or some other flowing water; and in every case the divinely-appointed administrator sprinkled the water on his fellow-man.

Some persons have imagined that it was a novel sight in Israel when two men, as John

and Jesus, went down to the river Jordan to use water in a religious rite. But to the Jew there was no novelty in this. It was one of the most common sights in the land. Here is a man living in the fertile valley of the river. He has just buried his dead. He must seek the ministerial offices of a friend that is undefiled. Water must be used. Cistern water will not answer. Well water is forbidden. Running water must be procured. So the two men walk down to the flowing waters of the Jordan, just as Jesus and John walked together. The water of the river is taken up, and then the one who acts as minister sprinkles the water on his friend. The banks of the Jordan, we may be sure, had in countless instances witnessed just such a scene as this.

A SUMMING UP.

And now we sum up this part of the case. At Mount Sinai a minister of God consecrated hundreds of thousands of people by sprinkling running water upon them. In every genera-

tion a minister restored the cleansed lepers to the service of God by sprinkling running water on them. A minister consecrated the thousands of Levi to the special work of God by sprinkling running water upon them. In every generation, in millions of cases, a divinely-appointed minister removed the defilement contracted from the most hideous type of sin by sprinkling running water on men. And now that John, a minister of God, uses running water upon Jesus, what shall we say? That he immersed Jesus? Why, to say that John immersed Jesus in running water, is to say this, that he violated the plainest laws on the statute-book directing the mode of baptism; that he disobeyed the reiterated instructions of God; that he put aside the examples of his ancestors from Aaron down; that he contravened all the precedents of his nation established in every tribe; in short, that he did what no Jew, acting under divine instruction, had ever done before. Believe this who can. For our own part, the case is a very clear one. John had

before him a record of baptisms running through 1500 years. He conformed to the record. He did what his father Zacharias, and all his forefathers as far back as Aaron had done. He did just what God commanded every minister of His to do. He sprinkled the running water on Jesus, his and our adorable Lord.

II.

Though the facts of the Bible that have been presented are so clear in showing the mode of baptism, an attempt is made to set them aside. To do this, it is said that the cases in which the Jews, by divine command, washed themselves, are the only examples of baptism in the Old Testament; and that these self-ablutions were immersions of the whole body in water.

SELF-WASHING NO PRECEDENT.

We think that a few simple considerations should have prevented such a view as this from

ever being advanced. First, when a Jew washed himself, it was a very different case from the baptism of Jesus by John. Jesus did not wash Himself. Under the gospel no man cleanses himself in baptism. The cleansing is done by a minister appointed by God. The Jew cleansing himself is not, then, as the lawyers would say, a precedent in the case. The real precedent is the cleansing of a Jew with water by a minister of God. We have seen how this was done. It was always by sprinkling.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION.

And underlying this there was a great spiritual truth. Baptism does not represent what a man does for himself. It represents what God does for him. Man is a spiritual leper. God, by His sovereign grace, cleanses the leprosy. Man is polluted with spiritual death. God rids him of the pollution. Man is an alien and stranger to God. God brings him nigh and consecrates him. And it is this

cleansing, consecrating grace of God that is represented in baptism. In this, man stands simply as a recipient. He does nothing for himself. And because it is all an act of God, God appoints His minister as His representative to do all the action in baptism. The man who is baptized merely accepts. He *receives* baptism. The act of the minister represents the act of God in bestowing His grace. And yet, after we have received the grace of God, there is a lifelong work before us. We are to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. vii. 1.)

Just so it was represented to the Jew. The minister of God sprinkled on him the "water of purifying." Here was the cleansing, consecrating grace of God in baptism. "Sprinkling the unclean," says the Apostle, "sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh." (Heb. vii. 13.) But now, cleansed and consecrated, the sinner must proceed to battle with his own corruptions. He must purge away his own

filthiness of spirit. And this self-cleansing work was symbolized by the self-washing. The minister of God first sprinkled water on him. Then the saved man must go and wash himself. First, the act of God in cleansing the sinner; then the work of the sinner cleansing himself. This distinction, so clear and simple, lies at the foundation of all true theology. Had it been duly observed in the study of the Jewish ritual, the self-washings of the Jew would never have been adduced as the counterpart of Christian baptism.

NO SELF-IMMERSION AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.

But in the next place, and finally. When the Jew washed himself, he did not immerse his whole body in water. Study the Old Testament through, and not a case can be found in which one of the people of God immersed himself. The Hebrew word used for these self-washings is *rachatz*. The translators of the King James' version sometimes render it "wash," sometimes "bathe." It means

simply to wash. It is used when Abraham invites the three strangers to wash their feet. (Gen. xviii. 4.) It is used when we are told that Joseph washed his face. (Gen. ixiii. 31.) It is used when the Jew is commanded to wash a piece of meat. (Ex. xxix. 17.) It is used to describe the washing of hands over the body of the slain heifer, (Deut. xxi. 6,) and the washing of the eyes with milk (Cant. v. 12.) It means to wash, and nothing more. And so, when the simple statement of Scripture is that a man washed himself, who is he that shall venture to add to the words of inspiration by saying that the man went and dipped himself head and ears under water? Is this the way in which men commonly wash themselves? The question needs no answer.

A GREAT MISTAKE ABOUT THE GREAT LAVER.

We once heard a Baptist minister enlarge on the subject of the great laver in the court of the tabernacle. In this laver the priests were commanded to wash themselves; and our

Baptist brother informed us that in these washings the priests always immersed themselves. Maimonides and other Jewish writers said so. Some eloquence was expended on the spectacle of the priests dipping themselves in the great basin. We had an opportunity to reply, and we simply turned the brother to the account of this washing of the priests as given in Exodus xl. 30-32. Here it is: "And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there to wash withal. And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet thereat; when they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near unto the altar, they washed, as the Lord commanded Moses." Where now was the imaginative picture of the priests immersing themselves in the laver? It was gone "like the baseless fabric of a vision." When the priests were commanded to wash themselves in the laver, they simply washed their hands and feet.

When we are told, then, that Rabbi Mai-

monides, who lived more than a thousand years after Christ, or any other rabbi, declares that the self-washings of the Old Testament were self-immersions, we answer that we do not propose to accept the traditions of Jewish elders, or the traditions of anybody else, and thereby make void the law of God. It has been our lot to hear the traditions of many elders—elders Presbyterian, elders Methodist, elders Roman Catholic, brought forward in support of immersion. But, with the word of God before us, all the traditions of all the elders who have lived are lighter than a single straw. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isa. viii. 20.)

In the record of baptisms from Moses to Christ, we have seen that there is not a single instance in which one Jew immersed another. Now we see that, in the record, there is not a single instance in which a Jew immersed himself.

Where, then, is immersion?

III.

When Moses or any other minister under the law sprinkled water, it was mingled with the blood of the sacrifice, or its equivalent, the ashes. When John sprinkled water, it was not mingled with blood. Why was this difference?

WATER A SYMBOL OF THE SPIRIT.

The running water was a symbol of the Holy Ghost. This is implied in many parts of the Bible, (Isa. xlv. 3; Mark i. 8; John iii. 5; Acts xi. 47; Titus iii. 5, 6,) and is expressly declared by the apostle John. He tells us that when Jesus spake of the rivers of living water, He spake of the Holy Spirit. (John vii. 38, 39.) Clear, bright, life-giving and cleansing, the living water was the vivid symbol of the Spirit of life. Now, the apostle John says further in his 1st Epistle, 5th chapter: "There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree in one." That is, the

water symbolizes the Spirit, which applies the blood of the atonement to cleanse from sin. This is the whole of salvation; and it is this blessed sum total of salvation that is seen in the sprinklings of the law. The blood of the sacrifice had been shed. The atonement had been made. But what avails the atonement unless it is applied to the sinner? And how is it applied? Why, the living water, representing the Spirit of life, is the medium by which the blood is applied; and so, the Spirit and the water and the blood bore witness in earth.

So it was till John the Baptist came. His ministry has been well described by the great Baptist minister, Robert Hall. It partook both of the Old Testament and of the New. It was of the Old, because its object was to prepare the way of the Lord. It was of the New, because the great sacrifice was now come. Robert Hall compares it to the twilight. It lay between the obscurity of one dispensation and the splendor of another. Chrysostom compares it to a bridge, whose springing arch

binds together parallel shores. One abutment rested on the Mosaic economy, the other rested on the Christian. As the ministry of John was partly legal, partly evangelical, so was his baptism. It was anticipative of Christ. "I knew him not," said John, "but that he should be manifest to Israel, therefore, am I come baptizing with water." Yet it implied that the Lamb of God, about to be manifest, was now in the world.

BAPTIZING IN THE JORDAN.

Since John's baptism was partly of the law and partly of the gospel, we might expect that it would combine the features of both. And so it did. It was of the law, in that John always used running water. It was of the gospel, in that the blood of the sacrifice was now left out. And here we have the simple reason why the evangelists mark so carefully the fact that John baptized in the river Jordan. When we say that a man washed his face in the river, we do not mean that he immersed

his face in the river. We mean that he used no basin. He applied the water to his face directly from the river. Now, when John's ancestors used running water in baptism, they always, by God's command, put the water in a basin, (Lev. xiv. 5; Num. xix. 17,) that it might be mixed with the blood or the ashes of the sacrifice. John used no basin. As a Jew would have washed the face of his little child in the Jordan, so John baptized in the Jordan. He applied the running water directly from the stream.* This showed in the clearest light that the water which he took up from the river

* There is not a particle of evidence in the Greek New Testament that either John or Jesus went into the river. As for the preposition "*eis*," if any one will turn to the Greek Bible which the writers of the gospels used, (Septuagint—1 Kings ii. 8; 2 Kings vi. 4; ii. 6; ii. 21; Judges iv. 7,) he will find case after case in which "*eis*" takes people down to the Jordan and other streams without taking them at all into the water. As for "*apo*," even so strenuous an immersionist as Dr. Carson admits the incorrectness of our English version. "The proper translation of "*apo*" is "from." "He came up from the water." (Carson on baptism, pp. 126-140.)

was unmingled with blood, according to the gospel. It showed with equal clearness that he used running water, according to the law; and as he used running water, so, according to all the commandments and ordinances of God, he sprinkled it upon those whom he baptized.

After John, we find no instance in the New Testament, where any one went to running water in order to baptize. The liberty of the gospel was fully come, and that freedom which dispensed with unleavened bread in the supper, and permitted any kind of bread, dispensed also with the running water in baptism, and allowed any water that might be at hand. So it has been to our day.

WATER NOT A SYMBOL OF THE GRAVE.

Yet, as in the baptism of Jesus, the water was the symbol of the Holy Ghost, so it is now. If a man says that the water with which Jesus was baptized symbolizes the grave—a place of burial—we tell him that this denies and contradicts the significance of the water as

a symbol of the Holy Ghost. A dove cannot be a symbol of gentleness and of fierceness. Oil cannot be a symbol of the gladness which makes the face to shine and of the rigidity which sits on the face of a corpse. Water cannot be a symbol of the life-giving Spirit and of the grave.

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of light, illuminating the minds of men. The grave is the abode of darkness. "What concord," says the apostle Paul, "hath light with darkness?" The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of cleansing. The water cleanses. But who ever descended into a grave to be cleansed? Who was ever put down into the place of corruption and decay in order to be made pure? The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of praise. He gives new tongues to men. On the day of Pentecost he made the room in which the disciples were gathered vocal with the praises of God. The grave is the abode of dread silence. And how can praise and silence, how can cleansing and corruption, how can brightness and darkness, how can life

and death exist in the same symbol? This cannot be. The church which holds that the water is a symbol of the grave must deny that the water is a symbol of the Spirit. It is thus left without *any* symbol of the Holy Ghost; and the symbol being lost, the tendency is, as the sad experience of many of the churches which immerse has shown, to ignore and deny the presence and work of the Spirit in the church.

TWO GIFTS AND TWO SYMBOLS.

God has given to His people two great gifts—His Son, who died for us, and His Spirit, who makes known to us the Son. For each of these gifts He has appointed a symbol. In the supper we have the symbol of His Son; in baptism we have the symbol of the Spirit; and no church can reject the symbol of the Spirit without inflicting on itself a wound that must be felt through the whole body.

In the baptism of Jesus, the presence of the Spirit was conspicuous. It was then the Holy

Ghost descended on Him; and as the Spirit descended on Him from above, so the water descended from above. He was baptized by sprinkling.

IV.

In the history of John's ministry the word "*baptidzo*" (baptize) is first used by the inspired writers. Why was this word chosen?

— A CLEAR CASE.

If anything in language is plain, it is that this word was not chosen to denote "immerse," or dip, or plunge. The apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts i. 5), and the Spirit was poured out on them, (Acts ii. 16, 17, 33). They were baptized with fire (Matt. iii. 11), and a tongue of fire came down and "sat upon each of them," (Acts ii. 3). The whole people of Israel were baptized in the pillar of cloud (1 Cor. x. 1, 2), and the cloud never touched them. They were bap-

tized in the sea, and not a drop of water came near them. Noah and his family were baptized in the flood (1 Peter iii. 20, 21), and they rode safe and dry over its waves. The Saviour was baptized in His sufferings (Luke xii. 50), and in them He was "stricken" and "smitten," (Isa. liii. 4). The great Baptizer is our Lord Jesus Christ. He baptizes all His people. He baptizes them with the Holy Ghost, (1 Cor. xii. 13); and He pours out the Holy Ghost on them all, (Titus iii. 5, 6). So here we have case after case in which the inspired writers use "*baptidzo*;" and it is as clear as sunlight that in not one of these do they mean immerse, or dip, or plunge. When a man asks us to believe that the brawny fisherman, Peter, was immersed in a tongue of fire no larger than his hand, or that the thousands of Israel were immersed in a cloud which moved high above their heads, he simply asks us to abdicate all common sense. This we shall aim not to do.

A GRAND V ORD.

Why then was "*baptidzo*" chosen?

The Greek language is the noblest ever spoken by man, and the word "*baptidzo*" is one of the noblest words in the Greek. When a person was brought completely under the influence or power of anything, he was said by the Greeks to be baptized in that thing. Alexander the Great was brought completely under the intoxicating influence of wine; the Greeks said that he was baptized in wine, (Cono. Narrat. 50). A merchant was brought completely under the depressing influence of debt; the Greeks said that he was baptized in debts, (Plato Symph. 176 B.). A city was brought completely under the lawless influence of brigands; the Greeks said that it was baptized by brigands, (Josephus, B. I. 433). A Jew was brought completely under the terrifying influence of the approaching Chaldean army; the Greeks said that he was baptized in the wickedness of the invasion, (Septuagint—Isa. xxi. 4). And so in other cases. The word

“baptidzo” had a power which we find in no single word of any language with which we have had to do.

GRANDEUR OF MEANING IN NEW TESTAMENT.

It was with this noble fulness of meaning the word was adopted by the writers of the New Testament. They had a grand idea to express. God brings His people completely—body, soul and spirit—under a purifying, sanctifying influence. To express this all-pervasive, cleansing, consecrating influence, the word *“baptidzo”* was chosen. The apostles were baptized with the Spirit. They were brought completely under the purifying influence of the Spirit. They were baptized with fire. They were brought completely under the purifying influence of the tiny flame which sat upon them. Their dross was purged away. They became red-hot men. They spake with tongues of fire. The people of Israel were baptized in the cloud, and in the sea. The whole nation was brought under the purifying influence of

the supernatural guidance granted them in the cloud, and of the miraculous deliverance through the passage of the sea. Then they "believed the Lord and His servant Moses," (Ex. xiv. 31). Noah and his family were baptized in the ark. They were brought completely under the purifying influence of the great flood of waters over which they rode. The worldly wickedness which threatened to overwhelm them was swept away, and the surviving human race was anew consecrated in covenant to God. Our Lord Jesus was baptized in His sufferings. He was brought completely under the purifying influence of the mighty agony through which He passed. Not that He had sin to be purged away; "yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered," (Heb. v. 8). He was "made perfect through sufferings," (Heb. ii. 10). The purity and holiness of His human nature received a new development, an enlarged strength in the supreme trial by which He conquered for us. Every true believer is baptized with the Spirit

and with water. All his powers and faculties are brought really under the purifying, sanctifying influence of the Spirit, and symbolically under the like influence of the water. So with every baptism, whether of the Old Testament or of the New. The inspired writers know but one meaning for the word "*baptidzo*"; it is to bring completely under a purifying influence. With them the word always means this, and it means nothing but this.

SPRINKLING THE SYMBOL OF TOTAL PURIFICATION.

If such be the grand spiritual idea embodied in the word baptize, is this fulness of truth properly symbolized by the use of a little water? If to baptize is to bring a man—body, soul and spirit—under a purifying influence, is all this rightly expressed by sprinkling a few clear drops on the person?

This question we have no need ourselves to answer. We step back that God may reply. He has given a response that is clear, full, decisive. Here are His blessed words, which

reach to His people through all time: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them," (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27). What more can God do for any of His people on earth? Here, in the fullest, most comprehensive terms that language can afford, He promises to them the purifying, sanctifying grace of His Spirit, cleansing them from all filthiness of sin, and consecrating them wholly to His blessed service. And this all-purifying, all-sanctifying, all-pervasive influence, how does God say that it is properly symbolized? He tells us emphatically, by the sprinkling of clean water. To bring His people completely under a purifying influence, He has designated but one symbol.

There is but one true, heaven-appointed mode of baptism. It is the sprinkling of water.

THE PROMISE AND THE SYMBOL.

When Jesus was baptized, God fulfilled to Him the promise, "I will put my Spirit within you." When God fulfilled this promise to His Son, did He change the symbol annexed to the promise? We trow not. At Jordan He filled Jesus with the Spirit (Luke iv. 1), and through His minister, John, according to His explicit assurance, He sprinkled clean water upon Him.

V.

When God has spoken, controversy among His people should end. Whether we can perceive the reason for His command or not, our only wisdom and our safety is to obey. And yet He invites us to study the *rationale* of His acts. He calls us to "mark well" the ordinances of His Church, that we may know the beauty and the wisdom with which they are framed. So

with baptism. Here we have a great truth, the purifying, sanctifying grace of God's Spirit, symbolized by the sprinkling of a little water. As Paul, speaking of the ashes put in the water of purifying, has expressed it in one sentence, "sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh." (Heb. ix. 13.) But if the truth symbolized be so vast, why use so little water? If the grace given be great, why not use a great deal of water?

RATIONALE.

The answer to this question brings before us the adorable wisdom of God. There is a reason why God commands us to use only a little water. He has constructed all the symbols of His Church on a beautiful principle—a principle that has been recognized by every intelligent and refined nation, both of ancient and modern times. It is this: *Whenever a great spiritual truth is symbolized by a material thing, it is necessary that a small quantity of the material be used, in order that the spiritual*

truth may be held vividly before the mind and heart. Where this principle is understood, there will be no difficulty in perceiving why God wishes us to use only a little water in baptism.

A LITTLE MATERIAL IN THE SYMBOLS OF CHRIST.

To illustrate. In the Lord's supper there is a great spiritual truth presented to us. It is the sacrifice of Christ, satisfying the human soul. The fulness and freeness of the gift of the Son are symbolized by the bread and the wine. If, then, so much grace is offered us in the symbols, ought we not to take much of the bread and wine? All Christians answer no. This was the error of the Corinthians. (1 Cor. xi. 22–34.) They ate much bread and drank much wine at the supper; but Paul corrected this. He taught them to satisfy their hunger at home, so that in the church they would use but a small quantity of bread and wine; and from that day to this, all Christians

have eaten but a morsel of bread and drank but a sip of wine at this feast.

And why not much bread and much wine to symbolize much grace? The answer is easy: If we had to eat and to drink much, the very quantity of the food and drink would distract our attention from the great spiritual truth which is symbolized. Our mind would be turned to the material feast rather than to the spiritual grace. But our Lord wishes it the other way. He would have our mind and heart filled with Him and the fulness of His dying love; and to this end He allows us barely enough of the material to suggest Him, and not so much as to turn our thoughts away. He instructs us to take but a little bread and a little wine.

LITTLE MATERIAL IN THE SYMBOL OF THE GREEK.

The Greeks understood this principle. The highest victory achieved by a Grecian citizen was symbolized by a crown which the victor wore. And what was the crown? Was it a

massive ornament of gold? Was it a diadem sparkling with precious stones? Not at all. It was a simple crown of leaves. And why only a crown of leaves? Again the answer is plain: A crown of burnished gold, a diadem glittering with jewels, would have attracted attention to itself. The crowd that beheld it would have thought of the splendor of the symbol rather than of the glory of the achievement which it symbolized. So the Greeks allowed barely enough material in the trophy to suggest the victory, and not so much as would fix attention on the trophy itself. Their highest symbol was made of a branch of laurel.

LITTLE MATERIAL IN THE SYMBOL OF WEDDED LOVE.

Every intelligent nation of modern times has adopted this principle of symbology. The deepest love known among the children of men is that which exists between husband and wife. And what is the chosen symbol to express this love? Is it a full set of jewelry? Is it much fine gold? No. It is the simplest of orna-

ments, a ring. And is the ring set with diamonds or rubies or pearls? No. It has no stone. It is not even enchased; it is not so much as carved. It is simplicity itself—a plain gold ring. And why is the deepest of earthly affections symbolized by the most meagre of earthly ornaments? The answer has been given. Did the eyes of the wife rest on a set of rich jewelry, or on a ring blazing with diamonds, her thoughts would be arrested by the material of the symbol. As it is, there is only enough material allowed to suggest the mutual love, leaving the mind free to dwell on the sweet depth of the truth.

LITTLE MATERIAL IN THE SYMBOL OF BAPTISM.

It is just so in baptism. The precious truth symbolized is the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit sent down by Jesus Christ. The symbol of this truth is water. To use “much water” is to hold back the thoughts from the truth. If a man stands while bucketful after bucketful of water is poured upon him, he is

sure to have his thoughts fixed only on the drenching to which he submits. If he is taken out on a wintry day and plunged under the cold waters of some stream, it is not in flesh and blood to think of anything save the icy shock of the current, and the dripping discomfort in the freezing air. To rise above such a symbol as this to the contemplation of spiritual truth, would demand nerves of iron and a superhuman will. So, as God has taught us to use but a little bread and a little wine in the supper, He has taught us to use but a little water in baptism; only enough to suggest to the mind the truth of the Spirit's purification, yet leaving the mind free to dwell on the blessed truth itself. For this reason He says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you." "So shall He sprinkle many nations."

In closing this little tract, it is with pleasure we avail ourselves of the opportunity to declare our appreciation of the Christian graces and the Christian labors which are seen among our brethren who practise immersion. There are

not a few among them with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and who, we know, are numbered among the excellent of the earth; yet, in their call for "much water," based on a mistranslation in our English Bible, as in every other feature of immersion, we are satisfied that they have made a grave mistake. It is a mistake to think that a sip of wine and a morsel of bread are not better symbols than a hearty meal. It is a mistake to think that a chaplet of leaves was not a better symbol to the Greeks than a weighty crown. It is a mistake to suppose that a plain gold ring is not a better symbol than a whole set of jewelry. It is a mistake to imagine that a single pressed flower is not a better memento than an entire garden, or that a lock of hair is not better than a whole wig.

BEAUTY OF CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS.

From all this we turn to scriptural facts and to the principles of a true taste. The ordinances of the New Testament are beautiful in

their simplicity. They rise above the ordinances of the Old Testament, in that they use less material. The Paschal Supper of the New Testament is the Paschal Supper of the Old Testament, with the blood of the sacrifice left out. The baptism of the New Testament is the baptism of the Old Testament, likewise with the blood left out. All the rites of the Old Testament which pointed to the person and work of Christ, have been gathered up and expressed in the slight symbols of the supper. In the same way, all the rites which pointed to the person and work of the Spirit, have been combined in the slight symbol of baptism. The supper of the New Testament uses less material than the supper of the Old. The baptism of the New Testament uses less material than the baptism of the Old. It is undisputed that in the baptisms of the Old Testament there was not a solitary instance in which one man immersed another. It is undisputed that there were innumerable cases in which one man,

by the divine command, sprinkled water on another. And from all this it follows, that when a man under the New Testament immerses another in much water, instead of rising above Judaism to the simplicity of the gospel, he has fallen below Judaism. Instead of sprinkling a few drops, as the Jew sprinkled, he now uses gallons. Instead of making the ordinance more refined, it is made coarser. And the chariot wheels of the Lord, instead of moving forward and upward, are turned and made to go downward and backward.

In the baptism of Jesus, there was an advance above Judaism. The ordinance became more refined. The material used was diminished. The blood of the sacrifice was dropped out. Only running water remained; and Jesus was baptized by sprinkling.







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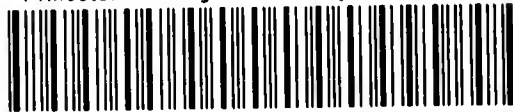
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